



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

December 16, 2013

Ms. Elaine Nicholson  
Assistant City Attorney  
Law Department  
City of Austin  
P.O. Box 1088  
Austin, Texas 78767-8828

OR2013-21836

Dear Ms. Nicholson:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Public Information Act (the "Act"), chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 513656.

The City of Austin (the "city") received a request for all information pertaining to a specified case.<sup>1</sup> You claim some of the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.107 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.<sup>2</sup>

Initially, we note some of the submitted information was created after the request was received. This information, which we have marked, is not responsive to the request. This

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<sup>1</sup>You state, and provide documentation showing, the city asked for and received clarification of the request. See Gov't Code § 552.222(b)(providing that if request for information is unclear, governmental body may ask requestor to clarify the request).

<sup>2</sup>We assume that the "representative sample" of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. See Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach, and therefore does not authorize the withholding of, any other requested records to the extent that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

decision does not address the public availability of the non-responsive information, and that information need not be released.

Section 552.107(1) of the Government Code protects information coming within the attorney-client privilege. Gov't Code § 552.107(1). When asserting the attorney-client privilege, a governmental body has the burden of providing the necessary facts to demonstrate the elements of the privilege in order to withhold the information at issue. Open Records Decision No. 676 at 6-7 (2002). First, a governmental body must demonstrate the information constitutes or documents a communication. *Id.* at 7. Second, the communication must have been made "for the purpose of facilitating the rendition of professional legal services" to the client governmental body. TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1). The privilege does not apply when an attorney or representative is involved in some capacity other than that of providing or facilitating professional legal services to the client governmental body. *In re Tex. Farmers Ins. Exch.*, 990 S.W.2d 337, 340 (Tex. App.—Texarkana 1999, orig. proceeding) (attorney-client privilege does not apply if attorney acting in a capacity other than that of attorney). Governmental attorneys often act in capacities other than that of professional legal counsel, such as administrators, investigators, or managers. Thus, the mere fact that a communication involves an attorney for the government does not demonstrate this element. Third, the privilege applies only to communications between or among clients, client representatives, lawyers, and lawyer representatives. TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1). Thus, a governmental body must inform this office of the identities and capacities of the individuals to whom each communication at issue has been made. Lastly, the attorney-client privilege applies only to a *confidential* communication, *id.*, meaning it was "not intended to be disclosed to third persons other than those to whom disclosure is made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services to the client or those reasonably necessary for the transmission of the communication." *Id.* 503(a)(5).

Whether a communication meets this definition depends on the *intent* of the parties involved at the time the information was communicated. *Osborne v. Johnson*, 954 S.W.2d 180, 184 (Tex. App.—Waco 1997, no pet.). Moreover, because the client may elect to waive the privilege at any time, a governmental body must explain the confidentiality of a communication has been maintained. Section 552.107(1) generally excepts an entire communication that is demonstrated to be protected by the attorney-client privilege unless otherwise waived by the governmental body. *See Huie v. DeShazo*, 922 S.W.2d 920, 923 (Tex. 1996) (privilege extends to entire communication, including facts contained therein).

You explain the information you have marked constitutes confidential communications between an assistant city attorney and city employees that were made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services. You also assert the communications were intended to be confidential and their confidentiality has been maintained. After reviewing your arguments and the information at issue, we agree the responsive information you have

marked constitutes privileged attorney-client communications that the city may withhold under section 552.107. The city must release the remaining responsive information.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular information at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other information or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For more information concerning those rights and responsibilities, please visit our website at [http://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/orl\\_ruling\\_info.shtml](http://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/orl_ruling_info.shtml), or call the Office of the Attorney General's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Act may be directed to the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Tamara H. Holland".

Tamara H. Holland  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

THH/bhf

Ref: ID# 513656

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)